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# Canada's Fur Industry



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Fine furs from Canada have been prized ever since the first European settlers came to the northern half of North America. In fact, it was the search for furs that first led adventurous Europeans to explore and develop the enormous wilderness of the country that was to become Canada. Furs were among the first exports from Canada and were of tremendous importance in the early days.

Fur-bearing animals are found in almost all parts of Canada, from the east coast to the west and from the northernmost Arctic regions to the United States border.

Canada's cold, crisp climate and the rugged terrain of much of the country contribute to the production of furs of the finest quality. Canada's fur-bearing animals have sleek, glossy coats, with dense under-fur and strong supple skins. From such pelts are fashioned garments that are the ultimate in beauty and warmth. Federal and provincial governments carry out extensive conservation and scientific programs to preserve the quality and quantity of Canadian furs.

### *Importance of harvesting*

Wildlife – particularly most fur species – cannot be "stockpiled". Natural mortality begins reducing the populations as soon as reproduction occurs, maintaining a balance between the reproductive rate and the capacity of the habitat. Unless surplus animals are harvested each season, they are either lost or survive at the expense of "range-quality".

Canada is blessed with vast areas of relatively undeveloped Crown land, much of it subject to multiple use, including forestry, fur-production, big-game hunting and recreation. The trapper or occasional hunter may be the only person to travel through these regions, and fur may be the only resource harvested in a given area during a particular year. Consequently, fur is a valid and important renewable resource, and the rules for its harvesting cannot be set by reference to conditions existing outside Canada.

Most provinces and territories in Canada have established some form of registered trap-line or fur-block system whereby specific trappers are licensed to harvest the annual fur-crop. A variety of management techniques is used to control and monitor the harvesting of each species as conditions dictate.

The species composition of the fur-harvest varies across Canada according to the habitats and climate

conditions of the various species. The decline in numbers of certain species tends to occur in areas where agriculture and industry have permanently altered the environment. Over-harvesting and the absence of sound management practices have also influenced the decline of certain species in some undeveloped areas.

#### *Management of fur-production*

Fur-production in Canada has responded favourably to management during the past 25 years – particularly the management of beaver and muskrat, which are under-harvested and in some areas constitute a problem of over-abundance. Restocking and rehabilitation of other species, notably marten and fisher, have aided in their re-establishment in previously-depleted areas. Some problems still exist but they are receiving attention. If there is one overriding national problem to be cited, it is that fur resources are not being fully harvested.

Canadian provincial and territorial governments have exclusive legislative responsibility and authority within their respective boundaries for the management and use of fur-bearing and other animals of value to the fur industry. The Federal Government has exclusive jurisdiction over marine mammals, which includes responsibility for the management and use of seals within Canada's territorial waters, and over mammals in national parks.

The principal Canadian furs are beaver, wild mink, arctic fox, muskrat, otter, coyote, timber wolf, red fox, Canada lynx and marten. The current fashion demand for long-haired furs finds Canada in a favourable position, since the bearers of such pelts are native to this country.

There are some 315 manufacturers of fur garments in Canada, who employ 2,400 workers. In 1977, they produced in excess of \$150-million worth of fur apparel, about \$48-million worth of which was exported, mostly to Switzerland, West Germany, the United States and Britain. Canada's sales of raw furs increases, on the average, 20 per cent a year.



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